



# ***Alabama Department of Senior Services***

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## ***Personal Choices Program***

Alabama's Option for Self-Directed Home and Community-Based Services

### **Frequently Asked Questions about the Personal Choices Program**

*For more information, contact the West Alabama Regional Commission's Area Agency on Aging at (205) 333-2990 or 1-800-432-5030.*

**Q. What is the *Personal Choices* program?**

**A.** *Personal Choices* is a Medicaid State Plan Option, newly available to States under the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, Section 6087 or 1915(j), that will allow participants of two of Alabama's Home and Community-Based Waivers to use the "Cash and Counseling" model for receiving their services. It will be administered by the Alabama Medicaid Agency and operated by the Alabama Department of Senior Services and the West Alabama Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging in partnership with Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

**Q. What is meant by "Cash & Counseling"?**

**A.** Cash & Counseling is an expanded model of consumer-direction or self-direction. It offers consumers more choice, flexibility and control in managing their daily lives. Self-direction means:

- The consumer decides who provides their care
- The consumer decides when the care is needed
- The consumer decides what help they need
- The consumer decides how much responsibility they want

**Q. What are the consumer's specific responsibilities under Cash & Counseling?**

**A.** The choice and flexibility offered by Cash & Counseling come with added responsibilities. Consumers who choose Cash & Counseling are responsible for:

- Developing and following a spending plan
- Hiring and managing their support workers
- Following their annual budget that is based on their assessed need

To help them carry out these responsibilities, *Personal Choices* participants will use a qualified Fiscal Employer Agent and have an assigned Counselor from the Area Agency

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on Aging. They can also designate someone they trust as a representative to help manage the responsibilities.

### **Q. Has the Cash & Counseling model been tested?**

**A.** Yes. Cash & Counseling is a model that has been tested over the past decade in three states: Arkansas, Florida, and New Jersey. These states have partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to study the outcomes of self-directed services in an extensive and carefully controlled research design that has been well documented. Because of the very positive results, CMS and Congress have seen fit to encourage States to make self-directed services more available as an option for people who receive home and community-based services.

### **Q. What have the positive outcomes been?**

**A.** Participation in a Cash and Counseling program has generally resulted in positive outcomes for people who have chosen to self-direct. These outcomes include:

- Increasing access to paid personal care
- Increasing satisfaction with services
- Increasing overall quality of life
- Meeting more of consumers' day-to-day needs
- Decreasing stress on families and informal caregivers

### **Q. How did the health outcomes of Cash & Counseling participants compare to the health outcomes of those enrolled in the traditional agency model?**

**A.** Overall, Cash & Counseling participants in all age groups proved no more likely to suffer from care-related health problems than those in traditional agency services. Cash & Counseling participants were *less* likely than those receiving agency services to experience:

- Falls (all age groups)
- Contractures (ages 65 or older)
- Urinary Tract Infections (ages 18 to 64)
- Bedsores (ages 18 to 64)

### **Q. What about the potential for fraud and abuse?**

**A.** There has been no evidence to show that Cash & Counseling leads to more fraud and abuse than the traditional system. The *Personal Choices* program has been designed to prevent fraud and abuse. These steps include: clearly defining what types goods and services may and may not be authorized for purchase, reviewing budgets to ensure that only those authorized goods are included, and reviewing workers' time sheets and participants' check requests before payment to ensure consistency with the budget plan. The "counseling" system of supports plays a crucial role in working with the consumer to prevent fraud and abuse.

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**Q. Is this kind of program more or less expensive than traditionally-managed services?**

**A.** Cash & Counseling improves consumer satisfaction and quality of life, reduces unmet care needs, and increases access to authorized services - all for the same cost of providing those same services under the traditional care system.

**Q. This sounds good – but do senior citizens and people with disabilities really want to manage their own services?**

**A.** An increasing number of people want to be more in charge of the services they receive in their own homes, regardless of age. People with disabilities have been calling for self-direction opportunities for years. A 2002 AARP survey of people over 50 also found that more than 75% preferred to be involved in the management of their own services. The U.S. Administration on Aging has made increased choice and control a key element in its *Choices for Independence* campaign.

**Q. What are some of the specifics about *Personal Choices*? When will it begin? What parts of the State will it operate in? Who can take advantage of it?**

**A.** *Personal Choices* is targeted to start on August 1, 2007. It will operate in seven counties (Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens and Tuscaloosa Counties) as a pilot project to begin with. People who receive personal care or personal assistance services under the Elderly and Disabled (E&D) Waiver or the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Waiver and live in one of the seven counties will be offered the choice of self-directing.

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*To contact the Alabama Department of Senior Services, call 1-877-425-2243 or visit <http://www.AgelineAlabama.gov>.*